

Consider the following cases. Is life going well for the people in those cases? If not, what would make life go better for them? Can standard theories of well-being account for these cases?

CASE 1. A is addicted to heroin, feeling an intense desire for it. Obtaining the drug is not a serious obstacle for A, and has little impact on the rest of his life. A takes little pleasure in taking the heroin, but if he stopped taking it, he would have severe withdrawal symptoms. A's life is slowly crumbling around him.

CASE 2. B has none of the standard life aims: he finds no satisfaction in art, culture, career, socializing, food, sex, and so on. Instead, his main and only aim in life is to catalogue and name all the squirrels in town.

CASE 3. As case 2, but B's obsession with squirrels would vanish if he took extended psychotherapy.

CASE 4. From a young age, C has been raised in a segregated religious community which emphasizes strict gender roles in which women are seen as inferior and subservient to men. C has very few experiences outside her community, and leaving it seems almost impossible to her. C has lived in an unequal and abusive marriage for twenty years, but she accepts it as being part of women's fate.

CASE 5. D thinks of herself as leading a fulfilling social life, surrounded by many friends, by whom she feels appreciated. Unbeknownst to her, however, she is a joke amongst them: they viciously mock her behind her back, and have a generally low opinion of her.

CASE 6. As case 5, and D is a billionaire, and her friends socialize with her because it means monetary benefits to them. While D is aware, in her more self-aware moments, that her friends aren't "real", it is psychologically more comforting for her to pretend that they are.

CASE 7. E is the mother of four (adult) children. Her main wish in life is that her children do well, and she has very few wants or desires

for herself. Unfortunately, E's children live far away, are somewhat alienated from her, and tell E only sporadically and uninformatively about their life. Her children's lives are in fact going well, but she does not know it.

CASE 8. F has *anorexia nervosa*: she desires to be thin over anything else, and she compulsively exercises. She already is thin to a medically worrying degree.

CASE 9. G is an extreme materialist hedonist: his life is all about consumption and the thrill of the moment. He sees little value in deep relationships, lasting achievements, music or literature, education or serious reflection, politics and culture, or any comparable thing.

CASE 10. As case 9, and G is a former professor of philosophy.

CASE 11. H lives a perfectly ordinary middle-class life: a safe job, a nice family in a sheltered suburban setting, a set of good friends, serious hobbies, and so on. This is all H ever wanted and worked for. But one morning, H wakes up and feels alienated from her own life: something is missing, but she does not know what.

CASE 12. J grows up in an extremely rich family. Over time, his tastes become insensitized. What would excite most people—e.g., a luxury trip to the Caribbean, or a new car—does not even get him mild excitement.

CASE 13. On the basis of moral and religious convictions, K leads an extremely self-effacing life: her aim is to do as much good as she can for others. She feels bad about accepting any benefits for herself.

CASE 14. As case 13, and moreover, K's spiritual life aim is to find perfect mental balance. Any strong emotions or feelings, good or bad, would seriously upset that balance, and are unwanted by K.

CASE 15. L lives under an oppressive government in an extremely poor country, and he has to navigate serious existential risks every day—for example, even a simple infection could mean his death. But

L has an extreme, naturally sunny disposition: he sees everything in a positive light, even where this is not justified. L thinks his life is going well.

CASE 16. As case 15, but L has escaped poverty, and immigrated to a safe, rich country. His experiences, however, have made him cynical and pessimistic. He nostalgically thinks back to his past life.

CASE 17. M is compulsively obsessed with being the best baseball player of all time. M fails to be the best baseball player in the world; he feels miserable despite considerable achievements. However, M is considered the greatest of all time after his death, having been underappreciated during his lifetime.

CASE 18. N is a sadist, who takes pleasure in the pain and general misfortune of others.

CASE 19. As case 18, but when N sees the suffering he has caused at the end of his life, he is overwhelmed by regret and guilt.

CASE 20. O starts a degree in philosophy, which she enjoys. Unbeknownst to O, any other degree would have actually brought her even greater enjoyment.

CASE 21. P and Q have a troubled, on-and-off romantic relationship. Brief periods of intense courtship are followed by long periods of mutual abuse. But like magnets, P and Q cannot stay away from each other. This is emotionally and psychologically draining to P and Q. P seriously wishes she was not attracted to Q any longer, but she cannot help it. She would need to move to a new city to stay away from Q, but while she has the means, she does not have the energy to realize this plan.

CASE 22. R lives comfortably of his inheritance. He spends most of this time “lazing”: sleeping, “hanging out” with friends, playing computer games. R has no serious ambitions, hopes, plans, or aims in life.

CASE 23. Finding real life cold and unappealing, S starts to spend significant amounts in a virtual reality game in which he interacts with sophisticated AI personalities. The game is designed to give S a sense of maximum life satisfaction. S has a virtual partner, family, friends, career, etc. in the computer game. A loss of these would be felt by S as if they were real.

CASE 24. T lives in a society in which sexist stereotypes about women are prevalent. T is educated, and knows about the existence of these stereotypes, and the importance of opposing them. Nonetheless, she personally enjoys playing to the stereotype of the naïve woman, which also helps her considerably in her career.

CASE 25. U lived a perfectly satisfactory life, until he learned that his brother had become a major celebrity. Reevaluating his life, U thinks that his own achievements suddenly look small and insignificant, and he starts to feel intensely unhappy.

CASE 26. In the near future, scientists have uncovered the secrets of positive feeling. Through a sophisticated implant, V is flooded with a constant cocktail of hormones which make him feel content and happy.

CASE 27. As case 26, but there is no implant: V has been genetically designed to have a high baseline feeling of contentment and happiness.